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ABSTRACT

Examined are recent advances in knowledge about children with peer relationship problems. Two specific developments are described: (1) an emerging recognition of the differences that exist between socially rejected versus neglected children; and (2) a growing appreciation for children's own perspectives on their social situations. The discussion is divided into four parts. The first section focuses on sociometric methods for identifying low-status children who may be experiencing difficulties in peer relations. The second section describes findings from recent studies on the behavioral correlates of children's peer status. In both the first and second sections, evidence is presented to support the distinction between rejected and neglected children. The third section of the paper surveys new information on the link between peer status and children's subjective sense of well-being. This information documents the importance of looking beyond observable aspects of children's social problems to consider the perceptions and feelings of the children themselves. The paper then ends with a discussion of techniques that have been found to be effective for helping children overcome problems in their peer relations. It is concluded that even though the focus of the paper is on problems, the underlying theme is quite positive. Parents and teachers should increase efforts to identify and help children who might be experiencing serious peer relationship problems. (RH)

PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN'S PEER RELATIONS: A BROADENING PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Social relationships all have their ups and downs. Conflict within relationships can in fact be a healthy process, strengthening the bond between social partners (Rubin, 1980) and teaching important social skills such as communication and compromise (Asher, Renshaw, & Hymel, 1982). Relationships with peers constitute a central element in children's social lives (Hartup, 1983), and most children are able to cope successfully with the problems that inevitably arise within these relationships. Friends may quarrel, but in most cases their disagreements are resolved and forgotten. Even when children's friendships do end, however, new relationships usually soon begin. Thus, despite occasional setbacks, the majority of children find their peer relationships to be an enduring source of both satisfaction (e.g., Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984) and security (e.g., Schwartz, 1972).

At the same time, there are a number of children for whom peer relations spell only persistent trouble. Researchers have found that about 5 to 10% of elementary school children are unable to acquire and maintain friendships with other members of their classes (Asher & Renshaw, 1981). These children who lack friends should

be of critical concern to parents and teachers alike. The children clearly miss out on many of the good times that close friends and associates are able to share. Perhaps more importantly, they also miss out on crucial social learnings (Combs & Slaby, 1977). Indeed, children who experience serious problems with peer relationships are likely to develop additional adjustment problems in later life, including academic and behavioral problems during adolescence (e.g., Roff, Sells, & Golden, 1972) and mental health problems during adulthood (e.g., Cowen, Pederson, Babigian, Izzo, & Trost, 1973).

This chapter examines recent advances in knowledge about children with peer relationship problems. Two specific developments are described: (1) an emerging recognition of the differences that exist between socially rejected versus neglected children; and (2) a growing appreciation for children's perspectives on their own social situations. It has only been within the past few years that researchers have conducted systematic studies to explore either of these issues.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first section focuses on sociometric methods for identifying low-status children who may be experiencing difficulties in peer relations. The second section describes findings

from recent studies on the behavioral correlates of children's peer status. In both the first and second sections, evidence is presented to support the distinction between rejected and neglected children. The third section of the chapter surveys new information on the link between peer status and children's subjective sense of well-being. This information documents the importance of looking beyond observable aspects of children's social problems to consider the perceptions and feelings of the children themselves. The chapter then ends with a discussion of techniques that have been found to be effective for helping children overcome problems in their peer relations.

Sociometric Assessment of Peer Relationship Problems

Sociometric methodology has been used widely to study children's peer relations (for reviews, see Asher & Hymel, 1981; Hymel, 1983a). By providing information about the relative status of peer group members, sociometric methods have enabled researchers to identify children who are having difficulties in establishing relationships with peers. Such low-status children are considered to be socially and psychologically at risk, so their clear-cut identification is critical (Asher & Hymel, 1981; Putallaz & Gottman, 1982).

The most commonly used sociometric method has been the peer nomination method. Within this approach, positive nominations (e.g., "Which classmates do you like the most?") measure how much children are liked by their peers, while negative nominations (e.g., "Which classmates do you like the least?") measure how much children are disliked or rejected. Most studies of children's peer relations have been limited to the use of positive nomination measures. Children's social status has thus been typically defined in terms of how much the children are liked, or how popular they are among their peers (Asher & Hymel, 1981; Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Gronlund, 1959).

Although researchers have typically relied upon positive nominations to determine social status, it was acknowledged long ago that this practice actually confounds two distinct types of low-status children: those who are rejected and those who are neglected (see Northway, 1944; Thompson & Powell, 1951). Rejected children are not liked and are actively disliked by peers; neglected children are simply not noticed, or overlooked (Asher & Hymel, 1981). Traditionally, both rejected and neglected children have been classified under the single label of the unpopular child (Meichenbaum, Bream, & Cohen, in press).

Evidence to support the distinction between rejected and neglected status has accumulated over the years, coming first from clinical observations (Bronfenbrenner, 1944; Northway, 1944, 1946) and later from more objective analysis of sociometric data. Empirical comparisons of children's positive and negative sociometric nomination scores have shown the scores to be only slightly negatively related (Gottman, 1977; Moore & Updegraff, 1964; Roff et al., 1972), if related at all (Goldman, Corsini, & deUrioste, 1980; Hartup, Glazer, & Charlesworth, 1967). This suggests that negative sociometric nominations do contribute unique information about children's social status which cannot be obtained through positive nominations alone (Moore & Updegraff, 1964). Specifically, negative nominations provide a methodology for subclassifying low-status children into those who are rejected and those who are neglected.

Researchers now tend to agree that the rejected-neglected distinction is essential to the precise delineation of children's social status categories. An interest in sorting out the unique problems of rejected versus neglected children has therefore been a guiding force behind recent investigations into children's peer relationship problems. Underlying such interest is a desire to enhance our ability to intervene in ways

that meet the children's individual needs. Even more basic is a desire to determine whether rejected and neglected children each require intervention. While it is true that both types of low-status children fail to establish close relationships with classroom peers, it is not clear whether the two groups are equally at risk because of this fact. Research bearing on these issues is discussed in subsequent sections of the chapter.

Before proceeding, though, a final comment is in order. There is as yet little empirical documentation of the effects that sociometric testing has on children and their social interactions. Without this knowledge, many researchers and practitioners remain skeptical about using sociometric procedures. In the only research available, Hayvren and Hymel (1984) found that preschool children did not change their behavior toward either liked or disliked peers as a result of sociometric interviews, including the administration of negative nomination measures. The children did not, in fact, discuss their negative sociometric choices at all when they returned to the classroom playgroup. These are encouraging findings which support claims that the benefits of sociometric assessment outweigh the risks (see Asher, 1983; Moore, 1967). Nonetheless, more research is needed if we are

to fully understand the consequences of sociometric testing for both preschool and school-age children. A particularly important research direction would be the comparative study of the effects of individual versus group administration procedures. Although group procedures are often used, it seems likely that any potential negative effects of sociometric measures would be strongest when children respond in a group setting. Furthermore, as Hayvren and Hymel (1984) noted, it will also be important to examine the impact that sociometric testing has on children's self-perceptions and their affective states.

The Behavioral Correlates of Peer Relationship Problems

Sociometric measures are useful for the identification of children who are having difficulties in peer relations. Sociometric measures provide no information, however, to aid in identifying the origin of children's social problems, or in detecting the factors that currently maintain the problems (Putallaz & Gottman, 1982). This requires more extensive investigation.

Although several explanations have been advanced to account for low social status, a behavioral perspective has predominated (Asher & Hymel, 1981; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981, 1982; Renshaw & Asher, 1982). The social-skill deficit model proposed by Asher and his colleagues (Asher

& Renshaw, 1981) describes this perspective in its most fully articulated form. According to the model, individual skillfulness is the crucial determinant of children's peer status. More specifically, it is hypothesized that low-status children are prevented from establishing effective peer relationships due to their own lack of social skills (Asher & Renshaw, 1981). The primary goal of research based on the social-skill model is the identification of skills that differentiate low-status children from children who are relatively more successful in their peer relations. An underlying assumption is that once the critical skills are identified, a "correctional process" (Putallaz & Gottman, 1982, p. 2) can be implemented to help the low-status children.

The literature on the social-skill correlates of sociometric status has focused primarily on children's overt behavioral styles (Asher & Renshaw, 1981). Since the 1930s, researchers have repeatedly attempted to characterize the behaviors of low- versus high-status children (for reviews, see Asher & Hymel, 1981; Asher, Oden, & Gottman, 1977; Asher et al., 1982). In general, low-status children have been found to exhibit less positive and less effective styles of social interaction than their higher-status peers. Until recently, however,

few studies had been designed to assess behavioral differences between the two types of low-status children.

As indicated, researchers have begun to recognize the necessity of differentiating between rejected and neglected status. Accordingly, they have applied the rejected-neglected distinction in new studies on the behavioral styles of low-status children (Carlson, Lahey, & Neeper, 1984; Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983; Dodge, Coie, & Brakke, 1982; French & Waas, 1985; Green, Vosk, Forehand, & Beck, 1981). The results of these studies are reviewed next. In each of the studies under review, status groupings have been accomplished through the combined use of positive and negative nomination sociometric measures.

Peer and Teacher Assessments of Low-Status Children

Researchers have used a variety of behavioral assessment techniques to study the interaction styles of rejected and neglected children. A number of studies have involved the use of peer and teacher assessments. Other studies have been based on more direct observational methods.

Gronlund and Anderson (1957) exemplified the use of peer assessments in their comparison of socially rejected, neglected, and accepted junior high school

students. This represents one of the first studies to focus separately on the characteristics of rejected versus neglected children. In the study, students nominated peers who best fit a variety of personal characteristics. The mean scores for each status group were then compared across the list of characteristics. Rejected students received the most nominations for being restless, talkative, and not likable, while neglected students received nominations only for being quiet. Accepted children were nominated the most for being cheerful, friendly, and likable.

In updates of the Gronlund and Anderson (1957) study, researchers (Carlson et al., 1984; Coie et al., 1982) have examined the ways in which elementary school children view classmates who fit the extreme types of social status. Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982) assessed these peer perceptions in terms of six specific aspects of social behavior: cooperates, leads, acts shy, disrupts, fights, and seeks help. Findings indicated that rejected children scored high on disrupts, fights, and seeks help, while popular children scored high on cooperates and leads. Neglected children recieved high ratings only for the category of acts shy. Following these earlier results, Carlson, Lahey, and Neeper (1984) also found that rejected elementary school children

were perceived by their peers to behave in a distinctly more negative manner than either neglected or accepted children. Carlson et al. (1984) did not, however, find significant differences in peer assessments of neglected versus accepted children. The behavior patterns of these groups were both described in predominantly prosocial terms.

Taken together, the results of these studies provide evidence that the two types of low-status children are indeed perceived differently by their classmates. Peers perceive rejected children as being antagonistic and aggressive. Neglected children apparently do not have quite as distinct a reputation among peers, but, if anything, tend to be perceived as quiet and shy. The results of two additional studies (French & Waas, 1985; Green et al., 1981) suggest that similar views are also held by the children's classroom teachers.

Green, Vosk, Forehand, and Beck (1981) compared groups of rejected, neglected, and accepted third-graders on teacher ratings of school behavior. Although differences between neglected children and the other two groups were not clear-cut, rejected children received significantly higher ratings than accepted children on two dimensions of behavior. Rejected children scored

higher on overall hyperactivity, which included the specific items of restless, excitable, disturbs, and demands teacher attention. They also scored higher on inattentive-passive, which assessed their lack of concentration and tendency to daydream.

These results were paralleled in more recent research by French and Waas (1985). In the study, teachers rated socially rejected second- and fifth-grade children as having widespread behavior problems. The set of problems attributed to rejected children included aggression, hostile isolation, task avoidance, and manifest anxiety. Not surprisingly, the teachers' reports were less revealing with regard to the behavioral profiles of neglected children. Neglected children were reported to have significantly more overall school behavior problems than popular children, but were not described as exhibiting any of the overt kinds of problems that were attributed to rejected children. This pattern of findings thus fits with those obtained from the other studies of peer and teacher perceptions. Among their classmates and teachers, rejected children tend to come across as hostile and disruptive. Neglected children, by contrast, tend to leave little clear-cut impression at all.

Direct Observations of Low-Status Children

Peer and teacher assessments have provided valuable insights into the classroom reputation of rejected and neglected children. But, from what specific behavior patterns do the children's reputations stem? Furthermore, do the reputations even reflect an accurate image of the children's actual interaction styles? It is by addressing questions like these that direct observational methods have made an integral contribution to research on the behavioral correlates of children's peer status.

Coie, Dodge, and their colleagues (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983; Dodge et al., 1982) have conducted an active program of research based on direct observations of children in both naturalistic and analogue settings. Their work has focused on the precise delineation of the types of status that children may hold within their peer groups (e.g., rejected versus neglected). It has also been characterized by a focus on relatively specific patterns of social behavior. The findings that have been reported to date document the utility of the approach.

In the first of the studies, Dodge et al. (1982) examined children's interactions across two separate aspects of the school environment: in the classroom during independent work period, and on the playground

during recess. Subjects included third- and fifth-grade children who were classified into rejected, neglected, popular, and average status groups.

Analysis of the observational data indicated that the rejected children exhibited significantly more aggression than any of the other children. This was coupled with a tendency to engage in context-inappropriate behavior. For example, the rejected children were frequently off-task during the classroom work period, daydreaming, wandering, or attempting to initiate contact with peers. They, in fact, made comparatively more social approaches during the classroom work period than did any of the other children under study. Given such disruptive behavior, it is not surprising that the rejected children were rebuffed by peers significantly more often than were popular or average children. Nor is it surprising that they spent significantly more time interacting with teachers (e.g., receiving directions, being reprimanded, or asking for help).

Dodge et al. (1982) also attempted to characterize the behavior patterns of neglected children. The profile that emerged from their results was one of low social visibility. Of all the children under study, the neglected children remained on task the most and approached peers

the least during the independent work period. Their apparent reluctance to initiate peer interaction also carried over into recess, even though this was the time when interaction among most class members was at its highest. When the neglected children did initiate contact with peers, they were more likely to be rebuffed than were either popular or average children. This proved to be one of the only points of similarity between the neglected and rejected groups.

Based on their findings, Dodge et al. (1982) speculated that peer-directed aggression and deviant social approach patterns may be important variables in the explanation of rejected and neglected status. Rejected children acted aggressively toward their peers. Furthermore, when they made prosocial approaches, their timing was poor and they came across as being disruptive. Neglected children, on the other hand, were neither aggressive nor disruptive. Instead, they made too few social approaches to be able to integrate successfully into ongoing peer interactions.

The investigators (Dodge et al., 1982) warned that support for these speculations came from observations of children who had already acquired their status as rejected or neglected. As others (e.g., Moore, 1967;

Renshaw & Asher, 1982) have also advised, a fundamental question concerning causality therefore remained. Did the observed behaviors cause the children's low social status, or were the behaviors a consequence of low social status?

The question of causality provided the impetus for two subsequent studies (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983). Dodge (1983) responded by designing a short-term longitudinal study to examine the development of social status over time. Six playgroups were formed for the study. Each group was made up of eight 7-year-old boys who had been previously unacquainted with one another. The groups met for eight play sessions, during which time the children's interactions were observed. Sociometric information was then obtained at the end of the last play session.

Dodge found that the boys' behaviors significantly predicted the social status that they came to acquire. Boys who became rejected directed significantly more verbal abuse and physical aggression toward their peers than did boys of average status. This pattern of aggressive behavior began with the first play session. In contrast, boys who became neglected refrained from aggressive behavior, and engaged in significantly more

solitary play than boys of average status. The neglected boys also made fewer social approaches than average, but this tendency did not appear until the later play sessions.

Results of the Dodge (1983) study support a mixed set of conclusions with regard to the question of causality. A pattern of peer-directed aggression was implicated as a possible cause of rejected status. Boys who became rejected behaved antisocially beginning with their first encounter in the new peer group. On the other hand, a pattern of infrequent social approach behavior appeared to result more as a consequence of low social status. Boys who became neglected socially approached peers with a high frequency during early play sessions. The low rates of social approach behavior which have been previously observed among neglected children (Dodge et al., 1982) did not emerge until later sessions. By that time, status distinctions within the groups had become clearly established.

Like Dodge (1983), Coie and Kupersmidt (1983) observed the behaviors of children who had been placed in groups of previously unfamiliar peers. They compared these behaviors to the behaviors of children interacting in groups of familiar peers. The purpose was to identify

patterns of behavior that are related to the emergence versus the maintenance of low social status.

Coie and Kupersmidt created 10 playgroups of fourth-grade boys on the basis of the boys' classroom social status. They placed four boys in each group. Of the four, one was a rejected child, one was neglected, one was popular, and one was average in status. Five of the groups were composed of boys who came from different schools and who thus did not know one another (unfamiliar groups). In each of the other five groups, the boys came from the same classroom and were all familiar with one another (familiar groups). The groups met once a week for 6 weeks.

Coie and Kupersmidt found that the boys' classroom status scores were significantly related to their final playgroup status scores. Classroom status positions thus tended to be reestablished in the new social situations. Rejected boys conformed most fully to their stereotypic social patterns. They were highly interactive and talkative whether they were playing with familiar or unfamiliar peers. Furthermore, they exhibited significantly more antisocial behavior than any other boys. This latter finding reinforces earlier speculations (Dodge 1983; Dodge et al., 1982) that a pattern of peer-

directed aggression may contribute to both the emergence and the maintenance of rejected status.

Whereas the behavior of rejected boys was similar across familiar and unfamiliar groups, neglected boys displayed somewhat different patterns of behavior among familiar versus unfamiliar peers. Among familiar peers, neglected boys were the least interactive of all the status types. Among unfamiliar peers, however, the neglected boys broke away from their usual social patterns to become more active and outgoing. The presence of familiar peers thus seemed to have constrained the neglected boys, and compelled them to maintain their low-visibility role. This finding fits with Dodge's (1983) speculation that neglected children may develop their characteristic pattern of infrequent social approach behavior as a response to negative experiences with peers.

Overall, the findings from these recent studies on the behavioral correlates of children's peer relationship problems demonstrate important differences that exist between rejected and neglected children. The two types of low-status children have been found to exhibit distinct behavioral styles which are reflected in distinctly different classroom reputations. Rejected children tend to irritate and to strike out against their peers. Neglected children tend to maintain a low-key social

profile, acting in ways that minimize the attention they receive. Although distinct, each of these patterns clearly limits the children's integration into the peer social system.

As efforts to understand children's peer relationship problems continue, we will need to learn more about the behaviors that relate to rejected and neglected status in girls. Several of the major studies in this area (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983) have been limited to all-male samples. Given that a number of the behavioral patterns identified in those studies are more characteristic of boys in general (e.g., direct aggression) [Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974], it is not clear whether the findings may be applied to the experiences of low-status girls. The results of a recent study by Ladd (1983) are suggestive in this regard, however. Ladd discovered that even when low-status boys and girls do not differ in the content of their behavior, they may nevertheless differ in style. Whereas rejected boys may be physically aggressive, for instance, rejected girls may be argumentative and verbally aggressive. It thus seems likely that the exploration of sex-related differences will be a productive direction for future sociometric research.

Along with gender differences, it will also be important to examine developmental differences in the patterns that characterize children's peer status. The distinction between rejected and neglected status has extended our understanding of social adjustment problems in schoolage children, but has rarely been applied in research with preschool samples (see Goldman et al., 1980; Peery, 1979). It remains to be seen, therefore, whether the rejected-neglected scheme is useful for classifying the types of difficulties that young children experience in peer group relations.

A more basic question left unresolved by current research is whether rejected and neglected children are both at risk in terms of their interpersonal adjustment. Rejected children exhibit obvious social problems which are likely to continue throughout later years (e.g., Coie & Dodge, 1983). The problems of neglected children would seem to be less significant, although a clear picture of what these children are like cannot be drawn from the existing data base. The "quietness" of some neglected children may reflect an inability to interact effectively with peers. Other neglected children may keep a low social profile simply because they prefer to focus on individual rather than group pursuits.

As Asher (1983) has noted, an intensive study of neglected children is needed to gain a more detailed account of the group's characteristics.

Finally, we need to learn more about how children's classroom reputations are acquired and maintained. As low-status children are labeled by peers, it may become increasingly difficult for the children to overcome their social problems (e.g., Dodge & Frame, 1982). What types of information do children use in attaching labels to one another? From what sources is this information obtained--teachers, friends, the children's own observations? These questions would provide an intriguing basis for future research. The issue of how teachers influence children's judgments of one another may be particularly important to pursue (Cairns, 1983). Research reviewed earlier indicates that peer and teacher perceptions of low-status children do have a strong basis in reality. Still, the possibility exists that teachers somehow mediate children's reputations among peers, and thus influence the children's peer status. Evidence supporting this notion has been obtained in studies with high school (Flanders & Havumäki, 1960) and mildly retarded elementary school students (Morrison, Forness, & MacMillan, 1983). Similar work should now be conducted with more general samples of preschool and schoolage children.

The Child's Perspective on Peer Relationship Problems

Up to this point, the review has revealed a growing diversification in how researchers view children's peer relationship problems. This diversification has not been limited, however, to a concern for sorting out the separate behavioral problems that are experienced by rejected versus neglected children. In a parallel and, in many ways, more striking development, researchers have also recently expanded the study of children's peer relationship problems to include greater consideration of children's perspectives on their own social situations.

Theoretically, the emerging interst in the child's perspective has been inspired by the cognitive-behavioral model of adjustment disorders (Meichenbaum et al., in press). The basic premise of this model is that cognitive and affective processes play a major role in determining the presence, or absence, of serious adjustment problems. Stress is not assumed to derive from any given situation or outcome per se (e.g., social rejection). Instead, it is assumed to be a function of how the individual appraises the outcome. With regard to children's peer relationship problems, then, the cognitive-behavioral model implies that the child's appraisal of his or her

own social situation is of paramount concern. In order to fully understand the problems that children are experiencing in peer relations, researchers must look beyond objective aspects of the children's social situations (e.g., peer status; behavioral patterns) to consider the perceptions and feelings of the children themselves (see Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984; Hymel, 1983b).

In applying these assumptions on the empirical level, investigators have begun by asking whether there is in fact any direct connection between children's peer status and their subjective sense of well-being. Recent studies have been designed to examine the link between peer status and various aspects of children's self-evaluations (e.g., Hymel, 1983b; Wheeler & Ladd, 1982). Other recent studies have been conducted to compare the general affective states of low-versus high-status children (e.g., Asher et al., 1984; Jacobsen, Lahey, & Strauss, 1983). The results of these studies are reviewed next, along with data from relevant prior investigations.

In the studies under review, researchers have assessed social status in a variety of different ways. Only a limited number of studies (Asher & Wheeler, 1983; Dahlquist & Ottinger, 1983; Waas & French, 1984) have

incorporated a distinction between rejected and neglected children. Cognitive and affective profiles of specific status types cannot therefore be presented to parallel the behavioral profiles that were presented earlier. Instead, the contribution of these studies comes in documenting the importance of the child's perspective, thereby establishing a new direction for research on children's peer relationship problems.

Peer Status and Children's Self-Evaluations

Self-perception of social status. When considering the child's perspective, it is important to know whether children are even aware of their own status among peers. Several studies have been designed to address this question. One group of investigators have focused on children's awareness of their specific status within the classroom peer group (Ausubel, Schiff, & Gasser, 1952; Hymel, 1983b; Krantz & Burton, in press). The central issue here has been the correspondence between the sociometric ratings that children actually received from their classmates and the ratings that the children expected to receive. Other researchers have focused on children's self-perceptions of their general effectiveness in establishing relationships with peers (Bukowski & Newcomb, 1983; Garrison, Earls, & Kindlon, 1983; Hymel, 1983b; Kurdek

& Krile, 1982). These latter researchers have drawn upon the work of Harter (1982; Harter & Pike, 1984) who has developed instruments to assess children's self-judgments within various life domains, including the domain of peer acceptance. The items on Harter's self-perceived peer acceptance scales refer to such issues as being easy to like, having a lot of friends, and doing things with other kids.

In studies with older elementary school children, positive correlations have consistently been obtained between sociometric status and both expected sociometric ratings and self-perceptions of general social effectiveness (Ausubel et al., 1952; Bukowski & Newcomb, 1983; Hymel, 1983b; Kurdek & Krile, 1982). These results suggest that children of age 8 and older tend to have at least some awareness of how well they are functioning in the peer social system. Children who are accepted by their classmates tend to perceive themselves as successful in peer relations; children who are not accepted by their classmates tend to lack a sense of social success. At the same time, the moderate magnitude of obtained correlations suggests that there may also be considerable variability within status levels. Evidently not <u>all</u> high-status elementary school children feel that they

have been successful in establishing peer relationships, while not all low-status children consider themselves to have been socially unsuccessful.

Findings in contrast to these have emerged from research with children below the age of 8. For this age group, which includes children in preschool through second grade, only negligible correlations have been found between measures of children's self-perceived and their actual peer relations (Garrison et al., 1983; Harter & Pike, 1984; Krantz & Burton, in press). There thus appear to be interesting developmental differences in the extent to which children's social self-perceptions can be expected to be realistic. Prior to third grade, distortions in such self-judgments may be the norm. As Harter (1983; Harter & Pike, 1984) has pointed out, the yourg child's egocentrism may allow the wish to be socially successful to intrude upon the child's judgment of his or her real self. This contention is supported by findings that young children do, in fact, tend to report somewhat inflated ratings of their own social status (Harter & Pike, 1984).

Self-perceptions of social abilities. Efforts to explicate the child's perspective on peer relationship problems have also included assessments of children's

perceptions about their own social abilities. Confidence in one's abilities to achieve interpersonal goals is assumed to be an important component of social adjustment (Asher, 1983; Goetz & Dweck, 1980). Researchers have, therefore, begun to look for a link between the amount of confidence children have in their own social abilities and the problems the children encounter in peer relations. Studies conducted to date have been primarily limited to analyses of the direct relationship between peer status and children's perceptions about their own social abilities.

The most specific information available has come from recent work by Wheeler and Ladd (1982). The focus of this work was the development of the Children's Self-Efficacy for Peer Interaction Scale, designed to measure elementary school children's confidence in their own social persuasion abilities. In administering the scale to samples of third- through fifth-grade childre, Wheeler and Ladd obtained relatively low, but significant, correlations between social self-efficacy and sociometric status. Low-status children expressed significantly less confidence in their own social persuasion abilities than did their higher-status peers.

Additional information about children's social self-confidence has come from studies of the causal

attributions that children make for their own interpersonal successes and failures (Ames, Ames, & Garrison, 1977; Dahlquist & Ottinger, 1983; Goetz & Dweck, 1980; Hymel, Freigang, Both, Bream, & Bonys, 1983; Waas and French, 1984). In these studies, children have typically been asked to explain why given hypothetical social situations would have occurred (e.g., "The girls in your class had a party but did not invite you. Why do you think that would happen?"). Their responses have been characterized in terms of broad dimensions of causality, and then examined in relation to the children's sociometric status. Taken together, the results have provided fairly consistent support for a relationship between peer status and children's tendency to make internal versus external attributions for hypothetical social outcomes.

Dahlquist and Ottinger (1983) found, for example, that while popular children tended to attribute social outcomes to internal causes, both rejected and neglected children tended to attribute such outcomes to external causes. These results were replicated by Waas and French (1984). Data from still other studies have documented even more specific differences in how children of each status type explain their social experiences (Ames et al., 1977; Goetz & Dweck, 1980; Hymel et al., 1983).

In these investigations, low-status children have been found to accept the blame for failure in hypothetical social situations, but to disavow personal credit for success. The reverse pattern has been found among more popular children.

The overall implication that can be drawn from the results of the attribution studies is that low-status children tend to have less confidence in their own social abilities than do popular children. They tend to see themselves as lacking control over peer interactions, in general, and are particularly prone to dismiss the possibility that their own actions could be instrumental in eliciting positive responses from peers. These conclusions are also consistent with the results of Wheeler and Ladd's (1982) work on social self-efficacy. Despite such cross-study consistencies, however, the conclusions must nevertheless be stated with caution. The magnitude of relationships between sociometric status and children's perceptions about their own social abilities has been low, so exceptions to the general pattern can be expected to occur. This point is important in that it corroborates what was learned from the recent studies on children's perceptions of their own peer status. One might predict that popular children would invariably

enjoy more positive self-evaluations than less popular children. Yet, as Hartup (1983) previously concluded, the relation between self-attitudes and social acceptance appears to be somewhat more complicated than this.

Peer Status and Children's Affective States

> Monday - An 8-year-old boy said to be depressed over classmates' accusations that he stole $4 at school was found hanged by his own belt on Sunday. The boy's father told news reporters that his son was depressed over the weekend and didn't want to go back to school. "He said he wasn't going back because he didn't steal the money," the father reported. "He said the kids kept picking on him." ("Boy Found," 1984)

The study of the affective experience associated with children's peer relationship represents a virtually unexplored research direction (See Sroufe, Shork, Matti, Lawroski, & LaFreniere, 1984). Yet, as the above news story so graphically illustrates, the study of emotions should prove to be extremely informative. In the few investigations that have been conducted, researchers have examined the link between peer status and the three affective variables of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The results of these investigations are reviewed next.

Anxiety. Preliminary descriptions of the affective correlates of peer relationship problems have come from studies of the relation between sociometric status and

anxiety. In initial studies of this kind, researchers discovered that low-status children tend to experience greater feelings of general anxiety than do their higher-status peers (see Hartup, 1970, for a review). For instance, McCandless, Castaneda, and Palermo (1956) obtained a significant negative correlation between peer status and general anxiousness for a sample of fourth- through sixth-grade children. Cowen, Zax, Klein, Izzo, and Trost (1965) obtained similar results in working with a group of third-graders. Such findings appear to be representative of those obtained in other comparable studies.

Beyond this early work on the link between peer status and children's general anxiety level, researchers have also taken beginning steps to explore the specific anxieties that children experience with regard to peer social relations. Buhrmester (1982) recently developed a self-report questionnaire which assesses elementary school children's anxieties about making and keeping friends (e.g., "How worried do you get about being liked by the kids at school?"). In a follow-up study using the questionnaire, he obtained a significant negative correlation between social anxiety and sociometric status. The children who were least accepted by their classmates

tended to feel the most nervous and worried about their own peer relationships.

In sum, it appears that anxiety is in fact experienced to a greater degree by children of low as compared to high peer status. At the same time, it must be noted that even given a rather specific measure of social anxiety (Buhrmester, 1982), correlations between anxiety and sociometric status have remained in the low-to-moderate range. This fact deserves mention because it underscores the potential complexity of any relationship that exists between children's peer status and their individual affective states.

Depression. Depression is another likely component of the affective experience underlying children's peer relationship problems. In an exploratory study of children's overall paterns of emotional response, Harter and Simovich (reported in Harter, 1984) asked elementary school children to describe their emotional reactions to success and failure within the area of peer social relations. Depression was the children's predominant emotional reaction to failure in peer relations. Of all the children interviewed, 46% said that they would respond to serious peer relationship problems by feeling sad and depressed.

Given descriptive evidence such as this, researchers have not been surprised to find that depression is significantly related to children's status in the peer group. Three recent studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between sociometric status and depression (Jacobsen et al., 1983; Lefkowitz & Tesiny, 1980; Vosk, Forehand, Parker, & RIckard, 1982), and the general findings have all been the same. Namely, low-status elementary school children have been found to be significantly more depressed than their higher-status classmates. It thus seems reasonable to assume that depression is an important dimension of children's social adjustment problems, one that should receive additional research attention.

Loneliness. The most specific information available with regard to the emotional implications of peer relationship problems has come from research on children's loneliness (Asher et al., 1984; Asher & Wheeler, 1983). Asher, Hymel, and Renshaw (1984) recently developed a self-report questionnaire to study loneliness and social dissatisfaction in elementary school children. Of particular interest have been differences in children's feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction as a function of the children's sociometric status.

The loneliness questionnaire has been administered to samples of third- through sixth-grade children who have been classified according to both sociometric ratings and positive sociometric nominations (Asher et al., 1984; Hymel, 1983b). As would be expected, the lower-status children have reported significantly greater loneliness and social dissatisfaction than their more accepted peers. What has been intriguing, however, is the variability that has occurred within status levels. Many of the low-status children have not expressed serious dissatisfaction with their own peer relationships. In contrast, a number of the popular children have described themselves as feeling left out and alone.

In a follow-up study, Asher and Wheeler (1983) subclassified low-status children into rejected and neglected groups. They found that rejected children were significantly more lonely than the children in all other status groups. Neglected children, on the other hand, were no more lonely than children of average sociometric status, and only somewhat more lonely than popular children. These are striking results given the traditional assumption that all low-status children are at risk in terms of their social adjustment. Above all, the data provide added evidence of the need to

distinguish between rejected and neglected children. Both groups of children lack widespread peer acceptance, yet, for some reason, only rejected children tend to express a strong subjective sense of social isolation.

Taken as a whole, the results reviewed in this section demonstrate that children's social status among peers is generally predictive of the children's subjective sense of well-being. Children of low peer status tend to experience a more negative set of self-perceptions than do children of higher peer status, judging themselves to be relatively incompetent and unsuccessful when it comes to social relationships. Low-status children likewise tend to experience more emotional problems than their higher-status peers. In research conducted to date, low sociometric status has been found to be associated with a number of negative affective states, including anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Still, it must be emphasized that these represent only general trends. Obtained correlations between peer status and indicators of children's subjective sense of well-being, although significant, have been rather low, and specific exceptions to the general patterns have been observed. It is precisely these exceptions, however--the low-status children who are contented and

the popular children who are not--that document the importance of considering the child's perspective on peer relationship problems. It is true that researchers have made only preliminary efforts to explore the thoughts and feelings that children experience with regard to their own peer relations. Yet, in so doing, they have offered what Maichenbaum et al. (in press, p. 21) refer to as a "promising agenda" for future peer relations research.

As the content of this research agenda takes shape, several issues should be given high-priority attention. First, studies are needed to examine the subjective outlooks of rejected versus neglected children. Clearly, children with such different visible social profiles would also be expected to possess differing subjective perspectives on themselves and their own social situations. Consider the evidence provided by Asher and Wheeler (1983). They discovered that whereas rejected children are much more lonely than the rest of their peers, neglected children are only somewhat more lonely than average of popular children. A conclusion that has since been drawn from the findings is that rejected children are generally a more at risk social status group than neglected children. Such a conclusion obviously addresses an

issue of important practical concern. Nevertheless, it will remain tentative until further information is available to describe the incidence of psychological adjustment problems (e.g., low self-esteem, depression) in rejected versus neglected children.

Findings to date also leave open important questions concerning the role that children's self-perceptions and emotional states play in contributing to the children's social problems. It is probable that a poor self-image and feelings of emotional distress represent a cause as well as a consequence of problematic peer relations. There is evidence, for example, that children who lack confidence in their own social abilities tend to exhibit little persistence or flexibility in their attempts to achieve social goals (Goetz & Dweck, 1980; Krasnor, 1983). It has similarly been demonstrated that the frequent display of negative affect can interfere with a child's effectiveness among peers, no matter how socially skillful the child might be (Sroufe et al., 1984). By examining the implications that self-perceptions and emotions have for children's overt interaction patterns, we may gain key insights into the processes through which children's peer problems are created and maintained.

A final issue left to be resolved is why obtained correlations between peer status and indicators of children's subjective sense of well-being have not been stronger. The overall magnitude of relationships in this area of research has been relatively low, certainly lower than would be expected given traditional assumptions regarding the significance of childhood peer relations (see Hartup, 1983). In order to explicate the link between peer status and children's sense of well-being, it may be necessary to consider the influence of intervening social-cognitive factors. Peplau and her associates (e.g., Peplau, Miceli, & Morasch, 1982) have argued that a useful direction would be to consider the personal standards, or aspirations, that children have for their own peer relations. According to this point of view, researchers should shift their emphasis from the objective level of children's peer relationships, and consider instead the extent to which such relationships meet the children's desired patterns, or aspirations, for peer relations. A low-status child who has correspondingly low social aspirations may actually feel quite comfortable with his or her personal circumstances. In contrast, a child who is popular by external standards may nevertheless have difficulty maintaining a subjective sense of

satisfaction and security if he or she is driven by unrealistically high social aspirations. These arguments are appealing. Yet, it remains for researchers to evaluate their validity.

Social Intervention Techniques

Even without formal assessments such as sociometric tests or behavioral observations, parents and teachers usually notice, and become concerned, when children lack friends in school. Once sparked, their concern generally turns to the question of why the children are encountering difficulties in peer interactions. Underlying this search for an explanation is a wish to obtain clues as to how they can best help the children overcome their social problems. The research literature on social intervention techniques is expanding steadily. Although more work is needed, a number of techniques have been found to be effective in remedying children's peer relationship problems. Furthermore, these techniques appear to be ones that could be employed successfully by practitioners in a wide variety of settings. Tyne and Flynn (1979) have shown, for example, that classroom teachers can improve the peer status of disliked students if simply provided with suggestions about possible intervention techniques!

As mentioned, a key to successful intervention is the ability to match the nature of the intervention to the specific needs of the children involved. Perhaps the most obvious need of many low-status children is the need to learn new skills for interacting with peers. Research reviewed earlier (e.g., Dodge et al., 1982) indicated that both rejected and neglected children tend to behave in ways that limit their acceptance among peers. Results from additional studies (e.g., Richard & Dodge, 1982) suggest that these maladaptive behavior patterns may stem from a lack of knowledge about effective interaction strategies. In these studies, children have been presented with hypothetical social problems (e.g., "What if you wanted to make friends with a new kid in the neighborhood?"), and asked to give their ideas about how to solve the problems. Low-status children have typically been able to generate fewer alternative solutions than their higher-status peers. Their ideas for dealing with social problems have likewise tended to be either too vague to be effective, or unnecessarily negative in tone (Pershaw & Ashler, 1982).

Based on the evidence that low-status children often lack knowledge of how to behave socially, researchers have attempted to improve the children's peer relations through direct instruction in social skills (Gottman,

Gonso, & Schuler, 1976; Gresham & Nagle, 1980; Hymel & Asher, 1977; Ladd, 1981; LaGreca & Santogrossi, 1980; Oden & Asher, 1977). The basic instructional plan followed in these social skill training studies has been threefold. First, low-status children have been given verbal instruction on ways to make their peer interactions more mutually satisfying and productive. For example, they have been taught general guidelines for being cooperative and supportive (e.g., Oden & Asher, 1977), as well as more specific techniques for engaging peers in play (e.g., LaGreca & Santogrossi, 1980). Following such instruction, the children have been given opportunities to practice the trained skills in either role-play or actual peer group situations. Finally, the children have been encouraged to reflect on their performance in the practice sessions, and to consider how their new-found skills could be used in day-to-day social interactions.

Taken together, the results of the social skill training studies are quite encouraging. With only two exceptions (Hymel & Asher, 1977; LaGreca & Santogrossi, 1980), the studies have revealed that direct instruction in social skills is effective in increasing low-status children's acceptance among peers. More importantly, the beneficial effect of skill training has been shown

to be a lasting one, with trained children's level of peer acceptance continuing to improve as much as 1 year following intervention (Oden & Asher, 1977). The message here is thus a clear one. Children can improve their social functioning if given support and guidance from adults. In many cases, the most appropriate form of guidance is direct coaching in social interaction concepts.

While coaching programs may remedy deficits in children's social knowledge, there are nevertheless other important reasons why low-status children display maladaptive social behaviors (Renshaw & Asher, 1982). Consider the case of the rejected child. Researchers have reported that rejected children frequently behave in a disruptive manner during classroom work periods, and that this behavior pattern contributes to the children's peer relationship problems (Dodge et al., 1982). It is of course possible that rejected children behave disruptively because they do not understand the rules of classroom social conduct. Yet, it is also plausible that the children behave disruptively because they are unable to occupy themselves with the assigned academic tasks. This latter explanation fits with what is known about the academic achievement of low-status children. Data are available to indicate that rejected children

do, in fact, tend to experience rather substantial academic problems. Comparable academic problems have not been noted among neglected children as a group (e.g., Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Green et al., 1981).

Recently, an intervention study was conducted to examine the connection between rejected children's academic and social problems (Coie & Krehbiel, 1984). The investigators provided intensive academic tutoring for fourth-grade students who were both rejected by peers and deficient in basic academic skills. Matched controls received either social skill training or no intervention at all. As predicted, the academic tutoring led to significant improvements in the rejected children's social status. Surprisingly, though, the social status gains produced by the academic tutoring were even stronger than those produced by the social skill training. By overcoming their academic deficits, the tutored children were apparently able to increase their on-task work behavior and conduct themselves in a manner that was more acceptable to classmates. They were likewise able to elicit more positive attention from teachers, which undoubtedly helped to further enhance their reputations among peers. Above all, these findings represent a call for diversity in how adults treat children's peer relationship problems. When such problems co-occur

with serious academic problems, intensive academic intervention may be necessary if the children are to become fully functioning, and accepted, members of their classroom groups.

The aim of the intervention techniques described thus far has been to increase low-status children's peer acceptance by bringing about improvements in the children's classroom behavior. Yet, is it reasonable to assume that peer attitudes toward the low-status children will necessarily improve as the children's behavior improves (see Asher, 1983)? Based on research evidence (e.g., Coie et al., 1982) we know that peers tend to maintain rather negative perceptions of both rejected and neglected children. It may be difficult for the low-status children to modify these negative reputations even given the benefits of an effective social skill of academic training program (Putallaz, 1982).

In line with these concerns, Bierman (1983; Bierman & Furman, 1984) has argued that behavioral change may be necessary but not sufficient for fostering peer acceptance of low-status children. Her work documents the importance of combining skill training with structured opportunities for trained children to make their new competencies known to peers. Teachers and other practitioners could

accomplish this in a number of ways. As has been done in successful social skill training studies (e.g., Oden & Asher, 1977), behavioral change activities could be coupled with peer-pairing. The basic plan, here, is to give low-status children a chance to practice the new skills they are learning with higher-status peer partners. Once these peer partners recognize that the low-status children can be rewarding play- or workmates, their acceptance will hopefully assist the low-status children in gaining entry to a broader segment of the classroom peer group (Bierman & Furman, 1984).

A related technique for helping low-status children overcome reputational problems involves the use of cooperative group projects. Under this scheme, low-status children who are being trained in new skills are also placed into small work groups with more popular classmates. The groups are then assigned interesting tasks (e.g., staging a play) which can only be accomplished if all group members work together. By imposing a cooperative goal, the group projects give the more popular children a reason to interact with low-status peers whom they previously would have avoided out of habit. In the process, the popular children often discover new bases for liking the low-status children, and hence

become more willing to integrate them into other peer group activities (e.g., Bierman & Furman, 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 1983).

It is certainly true that low-status children who lack friends exhibit the most salient social problems. Recent work on children's social self-perceptions has revealed, however, that low peer status may not be the only appropriate indicator of the need for intervention (Blyth, 1983; Dweck, 1981). Indeed, some low-status children apparently remain contented without becoming part of the classroom social circle. Some popular children, by contrast, appear from all outward signs to "have it made" socially, but themselves feel very troubled and alone (e.g., Asher et al., 1984). This potential variability requires that adults interested in children's social problems stay closely attuned to the subjective outlook of each individual child.

The focus on children's social self-perceptions is so new that specific interventions aimed at enhancing such self-perceptions have not yet been developed and tested (Meichenbaum et al., in press). Even without empirical documentation, though, there are several general strategies that would seem to be useful in helping children maintain a healthy outlook on their own social lives. First, it seems important for parents and teachers to

give children explicit opportunities to share any peer-related concerns they might have. Teachers could do this, for example, by giving older children the opportunity to write about social topics. The children could write about how they feel when a friend gets mad, or they could describe their probable reactions to being excluded from classmates' social activities. Puppets could be used to encourage younger children to express their thoughts and feelings about peer-related problems. In any case, experience indicates that children will often solicit advice on underlying social concerns once interest is expressed by a trusted adult.

In the same way, it seems important for adults to carefully monitor the kinds of social expectations they communicate to children. Several authors (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney, 1953; Rubin, 1980) have argued that adults in our culture tend to transmit the attitude that children should be liked by "all of the people all of the time." Such an unrealistic expectation, however, may leave many children feeling inadequate and insecure even after they attain relatively high levels of peer popularity. The appropriate goal for adults in fostering children's peer relations, then, is to create options without creating pressures. Children

with an overly intense desire for peer approval may need special reinforcement whenever they take action independent of peers. For these children, the most comforting form of adult support could be permission not to try to "please all of the people all of the time."

Conclusion

Recent sociometric research has been characterized by an increasing diversification in how investigators view children's peer relationship problems. Progress has been made in sorting out the separate problems that are experienced by rejected versus neglected children. Children's self-perceptions and affective states have likewise been introduced as important sources for gaining insight into children's social adjustment problems. With these advances in descriptive knowledge has come new potential for developing effective social intervention programs. Thus, even though the focus of the chapter is on problems, the underlying theme is nevertheless quite positive.

Parents and teachers should follow the lead of researchers, and increase their own commitment to identifying and helping children who might be experiencing serious peer relationship problems. The same inquisitive attitude that has led to productive research in this area should

also assist parents and teachers in accomplishing their more practical endeavors. By adopting a broad perspective and drawing information from a number of different sources, parents and teachers should be able to identify more clearly the social needs of individual children, and to create effective ways to meet those needs.

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